



STATE OF MICHIGAN

JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
LANSING

REBECCA A. HUMPHRIES
DIRECTOR

RESUBMITTED: June 6, 2005
RESUBMITTED: July 11, 2005
RESUBMITTED: August 1, 2005

Memorandum to the Natural Resources Commission:

SUBJECT: Waterfowl and Other Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations for 2005-2006

Authority:

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, as amended, authorizes the Director and the Commission to issue orders to manage wild animals in this state.

Discussion and Background:

Establishment and approval of migratory bird hunting season frameworks is controlled by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Criteria for selection of the primary seasons were provided by the USFWS in late July.

Population and Season Conditions:

The Michigan goose harvest consists of primarily resident giant Canada geese and migrant Canada geese from the Mississippi Valley Population (MVP). Migrant geese from the Southern James Bay Population (SJB) and cackling geese from the Tall Grass Prairie Population also make up a minor component of the harvest. The MVP is managed by the USFWS and Mississippi Flyway states using an annual quota system. Spring surveys this year estimated a 25% increase in the spring breeding population of MVP geese. However, the increase was not substantial enough to warrant an increase in harvest quotas for this hunting season. Numbers of SJB Canada geese were estimated to be similar to last year's population and there are no changes in hunting opportunities for this harvest zone.

Regulation changes are being recommended that will reduce harvest rates of local giant Canada geese to maintain their numbers within the established goal of 175,000 to 225,000 birds in the spring population. The number of Michigan resident geese was estimated at 165,000 this spring, the lowest estimate in a decade. Local geese remain abundant, but the statewide population was well below the record 325,000 spring estimate observed five years ago. Careful timing of the early, regular, and late goose seasons has prevented over-harvest of migrant geese (i.e., exceeding allotted quotas), while targeting giant Canada geese to control population growth. Although hunting cannot completely eliminate conflicts between geese and Michigan residents, maintaining the population near goal will help balance desires of hunters and others interested in seeing geese with desires of people seeking resolution of conflicts.

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Keith J. Charters-Chair • Mary Brown • Darnell Earley • Bob Garner • Gerald Hall • John Madigan • Frank Wheatlake

STEVENS T. MASON BUILDING • P.O. BOX 30028 • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48909-7528
www.michigan.gov/dnr • (517) 373-2329

Duck season length and daily limits are based largely on mallard population status and breeding waterfowl habitat conditions in the mid-continent Prairie and Parkland Regions. The relatively moderate number of mid-continent mallards and increased count of Canadian ponds resulted in approval by the Flyway Council and USFWS for a 60-day duck season the same as 2004. However, only about 20 percent of Michigan's duck harvest originates from the mid-continent, with the remainder coming from the Great Lakes Region and eastern Canada. Habitat conditions and duck breeding population size have changed relatively little in recent years for most duck species nesting in Michigan and Ontario, with the exception of mallards. The Michigan breeding waterfowl survey has revealed a steady and significant decline in mallards, with a 60 percent decline between 1998 and 2005 (567,000 to 230,000).

Michigan has had more conservative regulations than allowed by USFWS duck hunting frameworks by adopting a one-hen mallard daily limit compared to the two-hen mallard limit allowed by USFWS in the Mississippi Flyway. Continued concern about status of mallards in Michigan prompted biologists to estimate survival and harvest rates using information available from annual banding. These analyses suggest that survival and harvest rates were similar prior to and after initiation of 60-day hunting seasons. The package of duck hunting regulations adopted by Michigan during the 1997-2004 period protected local-breeding ducks from excessive harvest. Reduced availability of wetland habitats seems the best explanation of declines in Michigan mallard abundance since 1997.

Several species of ducks surveyed on the traditional survey area had similar population estimates as 2004. However, gadwall, scaup, and mallard populations showed a decline from 2004 while northern pintails and northern shovelers significantly increased from 2004.

Season Goals:

Working with waterfowl hunters, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has identified the following goals for waterfowl regulations in Michigan:

- Maximize waterfowl hunting opportunity, especially for youths, by:
 - ensuring season dates encompass maximum bird numbers and abundant species; and
 - maximizing statewide hunter days.
- Distribute hunting effort to take advantage of waterfowl resources and reduce hunter crowding.
- Simplify regulations where possible.

We are expanding the use of USFWS, DNR, and National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) data to develop recommendations that achieve these goals. Key information and analyses include:

- Hunter satisfaction/desires (DNR waterfowl hunter opinion surveys)
- Migration timing (DNR fall population surveys)
- Harvest timing (USFWS and DNR weekly harvest data)
- Hunter participation (DNR area use data)
- Hunter success (harvest/trip, DNR area harvest data)
- Weather (breeding habitat conditions, and freeze-up at various locations, NOAA data)
- Harvest composition (species occurrence, USFWS weekly harvest data).

Season Options:

Geese – The MVP quota for Michigan was established at the July Mississippi Flyway Council (MFC) meeting. The regular goose season framework must assure the MVP harvest quota is not exceeded. The earlier regular-season structure used in recent years has achieved this goal, with the added bonus of targeting molt-migrant giants which typically arrive in Michigan (from Hudson Bay) between

September 1-30. Molt migrants originating from urban areas are most vulnerable to hunting during this return flight in September.

The USFWS Regulations Committee has approved our request of a regular season opener as early as September 16, 2005. The Department is recommending regular season dates based on goose population goals, feedback from the Citizens Waterfowl Advisory Committee (CWAC), and surveys of other hunters. We hope to provide days of overlap in the regular goose season and the duck season, which hunters have identified as a high priority. The goose limit during the regular season will be consistent with established USFWS frameworks for the Mississippi Flyway. There are no changes in quotas, season length, or daily limits at Muskegon Waste Water, Saginaw County, and Tuscola/Huron goose management units (GMU). The Federal framework now allows the bag limit for the Allegan GMU to be increased to two per day. This increase in bag limit is not being recommended for the first eight days of the Allegan GMU season. This year, the regular goose season dates are the same for the SJBP Unit and the Lower Peninsula MVP Unit. The number of days allocated for both is 28. This year the season dates for the Upper Peninsula MVP Unit will be earlier to address hunter preference.

The recommended dates for the 2005 regular Canada goose season are:

- Zone 1 (Upper Peninsula) -- September 24 to October 21
- Zones 2 and 3 (Lower Peninsula) -- October 1 to October 16 and November 24 to December 5

The USFWS Regulations Committee has approved our request of a late season framework (Dec. 31-Feb. 7). This allows more flexibility when selecting dates for the late season. We are recommending a decrease in bag limit from five birds to three birds for both early and late seasons. This would help decrease the harvest pressure on the local population of giant Canada geese which would help maintain the population within the goal of 175,000 to 225,000.

The recommended dates for the 2005 special late Canada goose season are December 31, 2005 to January 29, 2006.

Ducks -- The USFWS offered a 60-day season and six-duck daily limit based on an adaptive harvest management strategy using prairie pond numbers and mid-continent mallard populations as a guide to season length and daily duck limit. The Wildlife Division developed the following duck season options for 2005 based on analysis of data on hunter opinions, waterfowl flights, temperatures, and on the feedback from the Citizen Waterfowl Advisory Committee (CWAC).

The USFWS limited the season for canvasback to 30 days within the overall 60-day duck season for 2005. The USFWS increased the season for northern pintails to 60 days within the overall 60-day duck season for 2005. The CWAC requested the canvasback season be the first 30 days in zone 1 and the canvasback season to be the last 30 days of the season in zones 2 and 3.

The recommended dates for the 2005 duck season are:

- **Option 1** - North Zone – October 1 to November 29, 2005
Middle Zone – October 1 to October 9 and October 22 to December 11, 2005
South Zone – October 15 to December 11 and December 31 to January 1, 2006
- **Option 2** - North Zone – October 1 to November 29, 2005
Middle Zone – October 1 to October 16 and October 22 to December 4, 2005
South Zone – October 8 to December 4 and December 31 to January 1, 2006

The combined opener of north and middle zones should decrease opening day hunter competition. Option 1 allows a two week mid-October gap in the middle zone when many hunters feel there is a drop in hunting success. The later starting date in the south zone in Option 1 allows increased hunting for late season migrants. Option 2 offers increased overlap in days between duck and goose seasons (68 vs. 56). Option 2 also reduces the chance of lost days in the middle zone due to freeze up, while maintaining the split season requested by CWAC, and increases the number of days available to hunt during the peak migration as recorded by Department Surveys.

The daily duck limit offered by the USFWS was six. There were additional restrictions on some species that are heavily harvested (e.g., mallards) or for those species that declined (e.g., canvasbacks, pintails, and scaup). The USFWS retained the hen mallard daily limit at two. However, the Department recommends a one-hen mallard limit for 2005. The USFWS reduced the bag limit of scaup from three birds to two birds per day. Merganser, coot, and moorhen recommendations were similar to 2004. Waterfowl shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

The USFWS again offered a two-day special youth waterfowl hunt this year which is scheduled for the third weekend in September (17 and 18). The Department proposes that the Director be delegated authority to make adjustments in season dates, season lengths, daily limits, and GMU quotas to keep waterfowl harvests within Federal guidelines for the Mississippi Flyway.

Based on the federal framework for taking migratory birds through falconry, it is necessary to adjust the days for taking geese at the Huron/Tuscola and Saginaw GMU.

Recommendation:

This order was submitted for information only at the July 7, 2005 meeting of the Natural Resources Commission. This item appeared in the July, 2005 Calendar and is eligible for approval on August 11, 2005. We are now recommending that it be acted upon at this meeting.

William E. Moritz, Chief
Wildlife Division

Alan Marble, Chief
Law Enforcement Division

Arminda S. Koch
Resource Management Deputy

Dennis Fedewa
Chief Deputy

I have analyzed and discussed these recommendations with staff and concur as to matters over which the Natural Resources Commission has authority.

Rebecca A. Humphries
Director

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ORDER

Amendment No. 16 of 2005

Under the authority of sections 40107 and 40113a, Act No. 451 of the Public Acts of 1994, as amended, being sections 324.40107 and 324.40113a of the Michigan Compiled Laws, the Natural Resources Commission and the Director of the Department of Natural Resources ordered that effective August 12, 2005, the following sections of the Wildlife Conservation Order shall read as follows:

3.413 Early September Canada goose season, daily limit, possession limit.

Sec. 3.413. During the early September Canada goose season, the daily limit shall be 3 Canada geese and the possession limit shall be 6 Canada geese.

3.415 Migratory birds; possession limit defined; open seasons.

Sec. 3.415. The migratory bird possession limit shall be twice the daily limit except that the possession limit for blue, snow, and Ross' geese shall be three times the daily limit. The migratory bird hunting open seasons shall be as follows:

Season and Species	Zone or Management Unit	Open Season
Ducks	North Zone	October 1 to November 29
	Middle Zone	October 1 to October 9 and October 22 to December 11
	South Zone	October 15 to December 11 and December 31 and January 1, 2006
Canvasbacks	North Zone	October 1 to October 30
	Middle Zone	November 12 to December 11, 2005
	South Zone	November 14 to December 11 and December 31, 2005 to January 1, 2006
Merganser		Same dates as ducks in the respective zones.
Coots and Moorhens		Same dates as ducks in the respective zones.
Canada Goose (regular season)	North Zone	September 24 to October 21
	Middle Zone	October 1 to October 16 and November 24 to December 5
	South Zone – Southern James Bay Population Unit	October 1 to October 16 and November 24 to December 5

	South Zone – Mississippi Valley Population Unit	October 1 to October 16 and November 24 to December 5
	Tuscola/Huron GMU	October 15 to December 3 (or quota)
	Saginaw County GMU	October 15 to December 3 (or quota)
	Allegan County GMU	November 24 to November 27 and December 24 to January 13, 2006 (or quota)
	Muskegon W.W. GMU	October 25 to November 14 and December 1 to December 4 (or quota)
Canada Goose (special late season)	Southern Michigan Goose Management Unit as defined in section 12.700 of this order.	December 31 to January 29, 2006
Brant, Snow, White-fronted, and Ross' Geese	Statewide	September 24 to December 5

3.416 Migratory game birds; daily limit.

Sec. 3.416. The daily limit of migratory game birds for the seasons specified in section 3.415 shall be as follows:

Ducks, daily limit.

(1) The daily limit shall be 6 ducks of which no more than 4 may be mallards, no more than 1 may be a female mallard, no more than 1 may be a black duck, no more than 2 may be wood ducks, no more than 2 may be scaup, no more than 1 may be a pintail, no more than 1 may be a canvasback, and no more than 2 may be redheads.

Merganser, daily limit.

(2) The daily limit shall be 5 mergansers of which no more than 1 may be a hooded merganser.

Canada geese, north, middle, and south zones, daily limit.

(3) In the north, middle, and south zones as described in sections 1.7, 1.8, and 1.9, the daily limit shall be 2 Canada geese.

Canada geese, daily limit, exceptions.

(4) The Canada goose daily limit shall be 2 except:

(a) In the Saginaw County, and Tuscola/Huron goose management units, the daily limit shall be 1 Canada goose.

(b) During the Canada goose special late season, the daily limit shall be 3 Canada geese.

(c) The daily limit shall be 1 Canada goose on the Allegan Goose Management Unit November 24 to November 27 and December 24 to December 31. The daily limit shall be 2 Canada geese on Allegan Goose Management Unit January 1 to January 13, 2006.

3.418 Goose management units, harvest quotas; department's wildlife chief to close season.

Sec. 3.418. (1) The following goose management units, described in sections 12.701 to 12.705 of this order, shall be open to goose hunting until the open seasons stipulated in section 3.415 of this order expire, or until the wildlife division chief determines that the following listed quota of Canada geese has been harvested:

(a) Saginaw county goose management unit - quota of 2,000 Canada geese.

(b) Allegan county goose management unit - quota of 1,500 Canada geese.

(c) Muskegon wastewater goose management unit – the quota of 500 Canada geese.

(d) Tuscola/Huron goose management unit - quota of 750 Canada geese.

(2) When the wildlife division chief determines that the quota of Canada geese for a management unit listed in this section has been harvested, the chief shall issue an interim order to close the goose hunting season in that unit.

3.422 Migratory birds, falconry, seasons; daily limit, possession limit.

Sec. 3.422. (1) The open season for taking migratory game birds by falconry shall be as follows:

Species	Open Seasons
Common snipe; Woodcock; Virginia and sora rails	The open season for these species shall be the same dates as the firearm seasons in the respective zones for these species
Geese	The open season for taking these species shall be the same dates as the firearm seasons in the respective zones and goose management units, except that the Huron/Tuscola and Saginaw goose management units shall not be open to taking geese by falconry from November 30 through December 3.
Ducks; mergansers; coots and moorhens	The open season for these species shall be the same dates as the firearm seasons in the respective zones for these species, plus the season shall also be open statewide from January 25 to March 10

(2) The daily limit for migratory game birds taken by falconry shall be 3 birds combined, and the possession limit shall be 6 birds combined.

Issued this 11th day of August, 2005.

Approved as to matters over which the Natural Resources Commission has authority.

Keith J. Charters, Chairman
Natural Resources Commission

Approved as to matters over which the Director has authority.

Rebecca A. Humphries
Director